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Political Factors Affecting the Participation of Russian NGOs in International Relations: Theoretical Conceptualization and Empirical Examples
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The paper presents the results of a long-term study on the political factors, which affect the participation of non-governmental non-profit organizations (NGOs) in international relations; the study also includes observations on Russian NGOs and their international activities.

The paper is prepared on the basis of empirical research conducted in 2011-2015 as part of the Research Line “Civil Society and Participation in Europe and Russia” of Centre for German and European Studies (St. Petersburg State University – University of Bielefeld) and in 2015 in the framework of the NEPORUS Project supported by the Norwegian Research Council’s grant no. 228205.

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Introduction

In recent years, especially since 2012, due to restrictive policies of the Russian government towards NGOs with foreign funding, the question of the role NGOs in general play in international relations has become relevant and interesting to discuss. The paper reflects this need and interest in understanding both general and specific, theoretical and empirical aspects of these policies. To this end, it presents possible theoretical frameworks, which can help to formulate hypotheses about NGOs in general, as well as to start testing them using the Russian case to explore their relevance in explaining the participation of NGOs in international relations based on an empirical analysis. Thus, the presented analysis aims to answer the research question: What are the main political factors influencing the participation of Russian NGOs in international relations?

In order to answer this research question more deeply, I would like to consider the Russian case from a comparative perspective. This case is highly relevant, because after 2012, the restrictive policies towards the foreign funding of NGOs in Russia were, in more or less similar ways, followed by governments of many other countries around the world (most of the countries listed below are analyzed in Carothers and Brechenmacher 2014, Carothers 2015). Thus, during 2014-2015, restrictive legislation and measures towards foreign funding of NGOs were adopted and implemented in China and India, emerging powers oriented on their own cultural traditions in politics. Israel is a case, which is explained differently, but it also should be included in this list from 2015. Another group of countries implemented some restricting measures towards NGOs and their foreign funding, this group consists of African and Asian developing countries, such as Angola, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone and some others. Such countries as Kenya, Laos, Nigeria, South Sudan, Vietnam as well as Jordan, Pakistan, Mexico, Venezuela are now planning such a policy. Post-Soviet countries are special cases, obviously following the Russian policy by adopting and implementing similar legislation, those are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and others. Among the post-Soviet countries, Belarus is also very interesting, because it implemented restrictive measures on the foreign funding of NGOs more than ten years ago, but before recent times it could be considered as an exception. Now it can be seen as one of the cases within the trend. Finally, the most recent development concerns also such unexpected cases as some Eastern European members of the European Union. Thus, some restrictive policies towards the foreign funding of NGOs were observed in 2014 in Hungary, and new measures are now expected in Poland.

The mentioned cases are not the only countries where restrictive measures were implemented, but Russia among them is very important, because its policies are very visible and strong, and because they have become a pattern for many followers - first of all, among the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, and in other areas too. Therefore, the analysis of the Russian case can help to understand the other cases better, and to evaluate hypotheses about the political factors explaining and influencing this trend in general.
First, I formulate theoretically-based hypotheses about the political factors affecting the international activities of NGOs, which could be relevant for the explanation of different cases and the general trend. They can be formulated in the framework of different theoretical approaches, which are relevant for different countries in the world.

Second, the hypotheses are specified for the Russian case. To do this, the history of the Russian NGOs participating in international relations is analyzed in the context of Russian foreign policy and policy towards NGOs, as well as some empirical examples of the participation of Russian NGOs in international forums.

Third, the hypotheses are tested on the Russian case. A policy analysis is carried out, as well as an empirical study of such international forums as World Heritage Watch network building, and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. There, a series of in-depth expert interviews with participants, surveys of members in the second case, and participatory observation during 2011 – 2015 were used for the collection of data.

The analysis of this qualitative data is complemented by the quantitative data collected by the ROMIR in the framework of the NEPORUS project. Although it is clear that the results of mass surveys in present-day Russia can be considered as not so reliable, because Russia has no long tradition of open and public political speaking, and there are limitations of political expression and freedoms. However, even if the data do not reflect the fair opinions of people, they reflect the people’s understanding of the dominant state ideology, which is enough for the argumentation of this paper. Moreover, it is interesting that in some aspects, where the dominant ideology does not provide any ready and simple answers, people give quite fair and reliable answers, like on the questions about the role of Russia in development policy. Therefore, even by taking into account the mentioned limitations, the data will be applied as part of the empirical basis of the argumentation.

Fourth, conclusions are formulated about the relevance of more general comparative-oriented hypotheses, which could be tested in further comparative analysis.

**Theoretical framework and formulation of hypotheses**

In looking for the relevant theoretical framework, it is important to stress that this study does not seek to cover all possible transnational and international NGOs, but mostly national NGOs, who act on the international arena in different ways. Very often, national NGOs cooperate with international and transnational ones, or even became part of them for some short- or long-term periods. But this kind of cooperation, and even integration, is considered here as a part of their strategy and not as a research object, because the transnational and international NGOs have some dynamics of development of their own, which are not always relevant for the national NGOs participating in international relations. As will be shown below, they do it in different ways: they participate in
the implementation of the foreign policy of their states, they try to act on the international arena in order to influence their own state’s policies, they cooperate with other NGOs for broader regional and global purposes etc. A more general classification will be presented in the paper, but here it is important to mention that all these forms are relevant for the research question, because all these activities are influenced by the political factors which are under study in this research.

In general, there is a lack of appropriate and ready conceptualization of the role or participation of NGOs in international relations. This is a consequence of the interdisciplinary nature of the research question: the participation of NGOs in international relations, and political factors influencing them, can be seen as parts of two major research areas and their corresponding streams of academic literature.

On the one hand, we could think of NGOs studies, but this field is mostly oriented on studies of NGOs’ role within nation states or societies. Thus, the most important perspectives are connected there with the questioning of civil society issues, such as the role of NGOs in the functioning and development of civil society, the motivation of people participating there, internal structures and development of NGOs, their contribution to democracy as well as the contribution of democracy and social policy to the development of NGOs etc. (Tarasenko 2014). Another central question in the NGOs research is oriented on the studies of their relations with state institutions and their role in decision-making and -implementation of policy, i.e. as institutions of interest intermediation and as participants in the social and other policies of nation states. The last stream of studies here is connected with the issue of the economic and social significance of NGOs in different societies and countries, which can be found in the literature on ‘third sector research’. In general, this field of research is quite developed, but almost completely concentrated on the NGOs within nation states, and not in the field of international relations. Therefore, it is not so relevant to search here for the appropriate framework.

On the other hand, in search of the appropriate conceptualization, we could look at international relations studies, a very well developed discipline with its own competing theoretical approaches and paradigms. In this field we see that the NGOs are not really a subject. Thus, in the neo-realist perspective, the most central notion is the one of a sovereign nation state, which has its own national interests and pursues them in the international arena in all possible ways, where other states behave and build their strategies in correspondence with their own national interests too. In the framework of this paradigm, all nation states act in the global arena in order to increase their power and influence on the global stage. In such a situation, non-governmental organizations have no significance in their own right: they are seen as acting in the national interests of their states, or those states who support them behind the scenes, and this may be the case even with some seemingly global actors or international organizations.
In the neo-liberal approach, NGOs are mentioned and recognized, but not really studied, because this research mostly focuses on other research questions, connected with world politics and trends in social development. Nevertheless, some general research is done from this perspective on global governance and global civil society, which is situated somewhere in between the NGOs research and international relations studies. It was quite popular in the 1990s, when “globalization studies” in general became a top research interest for many scholars in the world (see for example, a series of publications like Anheier et al., 2001; Salomon et al., 2003). In this framework, it was believed that technological, economic and social globalization is leading to the creation of a system of global governance and civil society, which will consist of transnational civil society structures, such as, first of all, international NGOs and transnational or even global social movements and forums. They became quite a popular subject of research, but they are not so relevant for the above-formulated question, because of their concentration on global structures and not really on the role of national NGOs (in our case Russian ones) in international relations. Although NGOs working in a single country are sometimes mentioned, when they participate in a global movement or structures, they are not the focus of research for the neo-liberal approach.

In general, there are some problems with the theoretical conceptualization and definition of models for the participation of national NGOs in international relations. But in spite of that, there are a lot of empirical studies, where the NGOs are considered as participants of some international relations or cooperation structures. Thus, there are empirically-oriented studies of NGOs' participation in development policies, international negotiations and the functioning of international organizations (for example, Betsill, Corell 2008). By summarizing such cases around the world, it is possible to create a classification of ideal types for NGOs from different countries, which show their position towards all these aspects in relation to their belonging to different kinds of nation states with the different status that these states have in the world.

It is obvious that the NGOs have different status in the developing countries compared with the capitalist market economies and liberal democracies of developed countries like the USA and Western Europe where they emerged. In the West, NGOs are rooted in domestic politics and social policies. In developed countries, NGOs are involved in the advocacy of interests of social groups, and the implementation of social policies in the framework of different models, which were developed during the building of democracies and market economies. This history is well explained in the framework of the social origin theory (Salamon, Anheier 1998). According to this approach, historical development explains the different roles of NGOs in the politics of different countries. Thus, in the USA and UK, NGOs traditionally are more independent from the state and are funded primarily through private foundations and contributions. In the continental and social-democratic models represented mainly by Germany, Scandinavian and other European states, NGOs are much more connected with state policies, have more state funding, and play a more
important role in politics, although to different extents and in different ways in each nation.

These traditional models of NGOs in domestic politics are also characteristic for the role of NGOs in the foreign policies of their corresponding states. Thus, in the USA and UK, NGOs are active in international relations, but they are mostly privately funded and less dependent on the governments in the countries where they are based, in comparison with the European NGOs, which are financially much more connected with their governments and their policies.

At the same time, both in domestic and foreign policies, the primary role of NGOs is to represent the interests and ideas of the citizens and their groups, which in foreign policy are mostly connected with support for democracy and human rights and attempts to solve social problems in the less developed countries. Citizens can have different reasons for seeking to give such support, but it is a primary source for these NGOs from the developed countries to be active in other poorer countries, first of all, developing countries.

The state funding for such international activities of NGOs comes additionally due to different programs, especially in the European countries. There, the same arguments of outsourcing, which work for the domestic social policies, are presented for foreign policy: for the state, it is easier and less expensive to outsource, i.e. to provide funding for the NGOs' projects rather than to implement the whole policy through state institutions. To summarize, the NGOs of these countries are involved in development policy through private and state funding, as donors helping the less developed countries to build democracy, to protect human rights and liberties and to solve social problems.

Another ideal type of NGO is presented in the developing countries, which mostly receive the international aid, so belong to the category of recipients. In this case, NGOs have a more subordinated role, both in domestic and external policies. They participate in the implementation of international aid, development policy and democracy promotion conducted by the Western countries. Because they prefer to implement it not only through state structures, they do it in most cases through NGOs, which became subordinated to these international financial institutions or organizations. At the same time, due to the authoritarian nature of local regimes and low levels of economic and social capital, they are, as a rule, also subordinated to the national authorities in the politics of the country where they are based. So, this means that the participation of NGOs in international relations in the recipient developing countries is reduced to the role of implementation, reflecting this recipient status, which is recognized both by the Western and international donors and national authorities.

However, in some cases, the NGOs in developing countries try to use international organizations as a channel to influence their own authorities, especially to defend human rights, to protect cultural and natural heritage, to campaign on environmental issues etc. Thus, they criticize their own government, for example, in the UN institutions and structures, by pushing the international institution to exert its influence on these governments. It was
described in the analytical literature as a ‘boomerang’ mechanism, which is quite popular for democracy and human rights promoting NGOs working in developing countries with authoritarian political regimes.

These two ideal types of NGOs and their role in the domestic and international policies of developed and developing countries are presented in Table 1. They play different roles also in the global civil society, i.e. in global forums or within international NGOs, but this aspect is not so important for the research question of this paper.

Having considered these two ideal types, it is possible to look more closely at cases, which have an intermediate position between these two types, i.e. NGOs in the emerging powers, to which group such countries as China, India, Brazil, Russia and some other countries, especially in Asia and Latin America belong. These countries are characterized by the transition from recipient to donor status. It means that they have rich experiences of getting international aid in the past, but now, due to their substantial economic growth, have become not only objects, but also subjects of development policy. In accordance with their status as donors, they support development in other countries, for different reasons and based on different principles. Thus, in recent years, their contribution to development policy has increased significantly.

In these countries, the NGOs have contradictory positions in domestic and international policies. They take different roles in the advocacy and implementation of social policy, and often increasing roles due to the “neo-liberalization” of social policies, but at the same time they are very limited in advocacy, because most political regimes in this group of countries are authoritarian ones.

In international relations, the NGOs have also contradictory positions. On the one hand, they have experience of, and still participate in, the implementation of development policies and democracy support programs of the developed countries and international organizations. At the same time, they are building some new forums of their own and are ready to participate in their own development policy. Therefore, they occupy some intermediate position between that of a still "developing" country and that of an already developed country.
Table 1. Role of NGOs in the internal and international policies, classified on the basis of their country of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developed countries (USA, Western Europe)</th>
<th>Role in the domestic politics</th>
<th>Role in development policy</th>
<th>Role in the global civil society / transnational cooperation between NGOs</th>
<th>Role in international transnational governmental negotiations / organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy and social policy (different models)</td>
<td>Donors</td>
<td>«Core», domination</td>
<td>Assistance of other countries in achievement of their influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinated role to the international financial institutions and/or authorities</td>
<td>Recipients</td>
<td>«Periphery», subordinated</td>
<td>A channel to influence the authorities in their countries of origin.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy and neo-liberalization of social policy, growth, new informal grass-root initiatives</td>
<td>Transition from the recipient to donor status</td>
<td>Emerging, anti-globalist forums</td>
<td>A channel to influence own governments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, this classification shows that firstly, the role of NGOs can to some extent depend on the status of their countries of origin in the international arena. Generally speaking, the transitional status of emerging economy and power as a political factor influence the restrictive measures and finally the international relations of national NGOs (Hypothesis 2).

Another assumption is that the specifics of political regime can influence the governmental policy towards NGOs and their international activities as well as their strategies on the international arena (Hypothesis 1). Especially, it is relevant to look at the level of authoritarianism, because it is one of the specific objectives of this kind of regime to eliminate all its critics. Obviously, NGOs which are financially independent from the state and strong can be regarded as potential critics and become a natural target for restrictive policy. Moreover, the
NGOs under authoritarian regimes use the corresponding strategies of influence on their governments’ domestic policies through the international organizations and pressure.

However, having only this explanation connected with the domestic policy is not enough to understand the current situation in many countries. Thus, in the debates, a response to the real or constructed external threats can lead to a «closing space» for NGOs with foreign funding and their resistance strategies (Hypothesis 3). The threats invoked may be transnational terrorism, migration flows etc. (Carothers 2015). The societies and their governments try to close the spaces available to NGOs in the hope of keeping their stability in the changing global world. Even if public opinion does not initiate such measures and policies, it may support them due to these arguments.

Another kind of explanation in the same direction and formulation of political factors can be connected with the general discussion on relationships between ‘globalization’ as the main global development trend in the 1990s and nation states, which are weakened or strengthened through globalization (for example: Cameron et al., 2006: 2-3). If, since the 2000s, the trend towards the return and strengthening of nation states as the major units of the international arena is observed, it is quite logical to assume that these attempts of states to limit the pressures both from outside and inside contribute to the reduction of domestic NGOs having finances from outside (Hypothesis 4). Although it is quite difficult methodologically to measure and to evaluate the significance of the strengthening of nation states and their sovereignty as a response to globalization, it is still interesting to elaborate on this hypothesis and to try to find a connection between the attempts to return national sovereignty and possible restrictive measures towards NGOs participating in international relations.

In the theoretical literature, this trend of strengthening the nation states again is reflected in the return to “neorealism” or “geopolitics” as a theoretical approach, which is again gaining popularity all over the world. As was said before, this approach does not see NGOs as independent actors in international relations, but only as part of the foreign policies of the nation states or international organizations. These organizations themselves tend to be seen as implementing the foreign policies of the dominating member states. The return of geopolitics and neorealism as the dominant ideology both in politics and in academic debates leading to restrictive policies of the states can also limit the NGOs participating in international relations (Hypothesis 5).

All these hypotheses are heard in the discussions around the restricting policies towards NGOs in different states, but they have not yet really been tested, because these processes are very recent, and time is needed for understanding them, especially in the comparative perspective. However, in the framework of this paper, we can look at the Russian case in more detail, in order to follow the process of emerging and strengthening restrictive policies and to reach some conclusions about the factors, which were important in Russia. Because these policies in Russia were developed earlier than in most other countries, and to some extent became the pattern for many governments following this route, it
makes sense to look at the Russian development and to make hypotheses about the factors and reasons more empirically-based.

Therefore, below I will try to elaborate on the above-formulated hypotheses using the Russian case as an example. Thus, the hypotheses on political factors influencing the participation of Russian NGOs in international relations can be formulated as follows:

**Hypothesis 1:** The specifics of the political regime in Russia may be a political factor influencing Russian government’s policy towards Russian NGOs and their international activities, as well as their strategies on the international arena. The hypothesis can be confirmed, if the introduction of the restrictive measures is connected with the strengthening of the authoritarian character of the political regime in Russia.

**Hypothesis 2:** Russia’s transitional status as an emerging economy and power, which could be both a recipient and a donor, is one of the political factors influencing the Russian restrictive measures and finally the international relations of Russian NGOs.

**Hypothesis 3:** The policy of «Closing space» for Russian NGOs with foreign funding and their resistance strategies is explained as a response of the Russian government to real or constructed external threats like transnational terrorism, migration flows etc. The hypothesis can be tested through the evaluation of the arguments about the potential or constructed threats brought by the governments introducing the restrictive measures towards Russian NGOs.

**Hypothesis 4:** By introducing restrictive measures, the Russian government is trying to limit pressures towards globalization from outside and inside, especially by limiting the activities of domestic NGOs which have finances from outside. The hypothesis can be tested through the search for a connection between the attempts to return to the sovereignty and possible restrictive measures towards NGOs participating in the international relations.

**Hypothesis 5:** The return of “geopolitics and neorealism” as a dominant ideology in Russia, both in politics and in academic debates, leads to restrictive policies to limit the NGOs participating in international relations. The hypothesis can be tested through the evaluation of the dominant political and academic discourses about the current Russian foreign policy as well as through their connection with the restrictive measures against Russian NGOs.

All these hypotheses about the role of political factors in forming the participation of the Russian NGOs in international relations will be tested in the case of Russia in the next sections of this paper. But before coming to this, the broader historical analysis will demonstrate the main principles of the NGOs participation in international relations in the 1990s and 2000s, as well as their connection with Russian foreign policy.
Specifics of the Russian case: newly established NGOs in international relations of the 1990s

When considering the case of Russia, it is necessary to look at least two periods of time when the NGOs sector was built and developed: the 1990s and 2000s, when the role of NGOs in international relations also changed dramatically.

Thus, the 1990s were characterized by very active establishment and development of independent organizations in a newly created country – the Russian Federation, on the basis of the political protest in the end of the 1980s. The NGOs were organized around ecological, social, ethnic, cultural and human rights issues (Zdravomyslova 1998). Some of these NGOs later became highly professionalized and very quickly started to occupy dominant positions in their fields of activities (Beljaeva 1995; Sungurov 1997). Another reason for NGOs development in this time was an urgent need for self-help in the difficult times of the economic and social crisis of the 1990s.

In the 1990s, the NGOs started also to participate in international relations. Especially it was expressed in the huge role of international and Western foundations and NGOs, which became very important, and often the only source of funding for newly established NGOs in Russia, because of the difficult economic and social situation in the country. Branch offices of American and European foundations, organizations and programs were established in Russia and these provided not only funding, but also training, capacity-building and networking opportunities.

It is difficult to overestimate a role of the Western foundations in the 1990s, when no other funding for newly established NGOs was available. At the same time, the approaches to the international aid and technical assistance of the USA and the European Union were different: the US was more active in supporting independent NGOs, while the EU concentrated more on the strengthening of state institutions and social partnership between the state and NGOs. This can be explained by the orientation of the US foundations on the American model of an active NGO sector and its private funding, while the EU and EU member states came with experiences of a traditionally stronger role of the state, and the idea of more effective support of the Russian reforms through the state authorities. Even when working with NGOs, the European foundations and partners promoted cooperation with the state institutions.

Moreover, for geographical reasons, the USA institutions supported NGOs with funding, some training and some short-term travel to the USA, while the European programs were oriented on the strengthening partnerships between the Russian and European NGOs. This aspect became important later, because these partnerships proved to be more stable also after the end of the active support, in comparison with the USA programs, which have built much less substantial partnership structures.
The difference between the US and EU strategies could be seen in their regional preferences. While US organizations operated in mostly more ‘familiar’ regions with relatively high levels of democratization such as Novgorod, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg oblasts (McMann 2004), the EU programs were mostly implemented in regions bordering the EU and some regions with a high level of urbanization and social capital (Lankina 2005). Therefore, for example in the Republic of Karelia bordering Finland, a very high level of financial and expert support was observed. In general, the regions of the Russian North-West received a lot of support and cooperation with their partners in the Northern countries of the European Union.

As a result of this funding, the Russian NGOs were included into Russian international relations, and especially into the cooperation of Russia with Western countries, including the USA and Europe. The reason was that the NGOs were seen by both the Western countries and Russia as sources of democratization and additional providers of social support. Therefore, their inclusion into Russian international cooperation was logical due to the common goals of Russia’s desired transition to democracy and market economy as part of Russia’s “European choice” (Arbatova 2005).

It is interesting that the Russian federal government paid no attention to NGOs in the 1990s, because it had some other priorities and in general could not control a lot of fields of life. In such a situation, the NGOs could feel free to cooperate and to work on their own. At the same time, in different regions they developed differently. In some regions, like in the North-Western regions bordering the EU, NGOs developed more actively and became more important also for the regional and local politics due to EU support (Yargomskaya et al., 2004). In such regions, the NGOs were visible and were considered as a significant part of EU-Russia cross-border cooperation.

To sum up, although the Western programs were sometimes criticized for their insufficient effectiveness and the excessive hegemony of the Western experts over the specific recipients’ needs (Mikhaleva 2005), in general, the international funding was highly important for Russian NGOs, by contributing to their establishment, development, training, self-understanding and professionalization. Moreover, in this time the activities of Russian NGOs in international relations, mostly through cooperation with the Western foundations and NGOs, was in line with the official Russian foreign policy, even if the governments of the period paid no attention to them. But the NGOs contributed to the building of civil society, democracy and market economy as well as to the inclusion of Russia into the Western world and global cooperation, which were also priorities for the Russian internal and foreign policies in the 1990s. Therefore, although on the initiative of the Western partners, Russian NGOs participated in the international relations in line with the Russian foreign policy and played a quite important role in the cooperation between Western countries and Russia.
The 2000s: contradicting trends in Russian foreign policy and international relations of NGOs

In the 1990s the development of Russian foreign policy and NGOs involvement in international cooperation were quite independent, but went in the same direction. By contrast, in the 2000s, the situation became quite complicated. After Vladimir Putin became president of the Russian Federation in 2000, Russian policies changed both in the foreign affairs arena and in the policy towards NGOs.

Thus, in the field of international relations, Russia slowly turned from its rapprochement with the West towards pursuit of its own “national interests”. For example, in the EU-Russia relations it was firstly seen in the separate EU and Russian strategies towards each other in 1999 and 2000 respectively, where the strategic interests were formulated very clearly. While the EU defined as strategic goals stability, democracy, rule of law, social market economy in Russia and security in Europe, the Russian strategy was “primarily aimed at ensuring national interests and enhancing the role and image of Russia in Europe and in the world” (Morozov 2003). The Russian concept aimed to modernize and bring Russia back to being one of the most important global players. Here, Russia openly expressed its readiness to accept European technical assistance for its national interests, which were conceptualized as different to the European interests and values.

At the same time, Western, and especially European politicians began to seriously criticize Russia for its refusal to follow the path of democratization. This led to a more and more skeptical position of Russia towards the West (Sergounin 2000).

In the EU-Russia relations, for example, this recognition of differences in approaches and, at the same time mutual interests, led to the establishment of a new model of ‘strategic partnership’. It meant change of the old model, where Russia was a recipient of international aid, towards a more equal partnership and building of a more pragmatic problem-solving model (Klitsunova 2005). The most important expression of this model in the EU-Russia relations was a declaration of four EU-Russia “common spaces”: (1) economic space; (2) common space of freedom, internal security and justice; (3) external security; and (4) common space of research and education, including cultural aspects1.

Another factor for the building of this new model in the EU-Russia relations was the expected EU Eastern enlargement in May 2004, which made it important for the EU to solve problems of soft security in the border regions, i.e. to decrease ecological and nuclear threats, to promote the rule of law and a favorable social environment. To do so, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was proposed

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by the EU for all new neighbors. But the Russian government refused it: due to the economic growth and redirection of its foreign policy towards claiming a place as one of the rapidly re-emerging global players, Russia did not want to be just a “junior partner” of the EU as was the case with other ENP countries. Therefore, it was excluded from the ENP, but at the same time, it stayed to be a target of the EU funding in the framework of the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which included a notion of “partnership” especially for Russian strategic partnership.

In this way, EU financial support decreased significantly, and technical assistance within the TACIS framework was replaced from 2007 by EU-Russian Cooperation Programs. They were oriented both on the cooperation between state institutions and civil society (Institution Building Partnership Programs), and on NGOs dealing with human rights and social support (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights and others). The EU resources become focused on partnership with co-funding from the Russian side.

Cross-border cooperation became especially important the ENPI in Russia, and was funded both by the ENPI and Russia. Decision-making in this framework was shifted to the level of EU-Russian cross-border regions, which decide on an equal footing with each other about the selection of priorities and projects. For this, five regional programs were created in 2005 on the EU-Russian border, which established their own joint decision-making institutions for the budget period of 2007-2013 (see in more details: Yarovoy, Belokurova 2012).

Aside from the ENPI, for the strengthening of regional cross-border cooperation of the EU with Russia including non-governmental level, the so-called “Northern Dimension Initiative” (NDI) was launched by the EU in 1997. It defined a more consequential EU strategy towards the European North, with a special role for Russia (Haukkala 2003). The NDI multi-level approach foresaw involvement of different actors, which were already active in this field: EU, EU member states; international interregional organizations like Council of the Baltic Sea States, Barents Euro-Arctic Region, Arctic Council etc.; international agencies like the International Agency on Energy etc.; non-state actors like local and regional organizations (for example, Baltic Sea Cities Union), business and civil society communities etc. The most important projects were implemented in the NDI framework in the fields of environmental protection, nuclear and energy security, human and academic resources development, health and life quality. For this, no additional funding was planned, but already existing EU and international financial institutions were coordinated. In 2006, the NDI was reorganized into the Northern Dimension policy (ND) with the participation of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland as a regional dimension of four common spaces. For better organization, four ND Partnerships were created between 2003 and 2013: ND Environmental Partnership, ND Partnership on Public Health and Social Wellbeing, ND Partnership on Transport and Logistics, and ND Partnership on Culture. Each Partnership coordinates the activities of different actors involved, including NGOs and financial institutions in the corresponding fields. Moreover, such consultative structures as ND Business Council and ND Institute were
established from below as coordinated networks of the EU and Russian business and universities correspondingly. This all together created a multifaceted and complicated institutional structure.

Although NGOs continued to participate in the cooperation with the EU and Western partners, the Russian national policy towards NGOs became less favorable, especially after 2004 (see more on the change of discourses and policies towards the NGOs here: Belokurova 2010). Among others, this shift was connected with the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine, after which NGOs primarily funded by the Western foundations and criticizing national policies were demonized as potential threats and organizers of the so-called ‘color revolutions’ against the national interests of Russia. As a result, in 2006 new legislation was adopted, which strengthened the government’s control over NGOs, especially for those having foreign funding (Human Rights Watch 2008, 2009). This policy was especially strong in 2006-2007, before the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2007 and 2008 respectively.

During the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev in 2008-2012, the situation improved temporarily, when the new more liberal legislation on NGOs was elaborated and even implemented in order to facilitate the management of NGOs as well as their opportunities for development.

But, after the election of President Putin in 2012, as well as after the mass protest citizens movement “For Fair Elections”, the restrictive policy towards critical NGOs supported by foreign foundations was strengthened - by the adoption and implementation of new legislation on ‘foreign agents’ since 2012. This status was introduced for the NGOs, who have received some financial supports from abroad and at the same time participated in ‘political activity’, which was defined in the legislation, and later during its implementation, very broadly. Nearly any public expression of opinion by an organization and its leaders can be considered as political activity and can lead to this status. In spite of many legal proceedings, by now (January 2016) the list of ‘foreign agents’ has now more than 110 NGOs and is going to be widened even more. Although this status does not mean the liquidation of the NGOs, it makes the work of these NGOs extremely difficult, cooperation with state officials impossible, and their perception by wider groups of the population negative.

Later, in May 2015 the new legislation was adopted on ‘undesirable organizations’, the new status for foreign non-profit organizations operating in

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2 More information about the Northern Dimension: http://www.northerndimension.info/
5 The list of NGOs having factions of ‘foreign agents’ is managed by the Ministry of Justice: http://unro.minjust.ru/NKOForeignAgent.aspx
Russia. By the end of 2015, 5 organizations had got this status, all of them were foundations originating from the USA. It is expected that this list will be widened further. As a consequence, some Russian offices of the foreign foundations and NGOs were closed or reduced their activities drastically.

To sum up, since 2012, the Russian government's policy towards the NGOs involved in international relations by getting support from Western and international organizations and foundations, has changed to very a restrictive one. Although some restrictive measures were introduced firstly in 2006-2007, they became strong and very obvious in 2012-2015 and later. So, it means that the Russian government is trying to limit the participation of these NGOs in international relations, even although these restrictive measures negatively influenced its relations both with Western countries and international organizations, who criticize such a development.

At the same time, in the 2000s the Russian president started to financially and organizationally support many Russian NGOs acting primarily as ‘socially oriented’ groups in the field of citizens’ social protection. A special category of ‘socially oriented’ NGOs was introduced, a lot of programs were developed and events were organized in order to support them by the state.

Although this supporting policy concerns mostly the NGOs working in the internal social policy field, the same logic of support is also applied towards some NGOs participating in international relations. Thus, in this logic, the NGOs involved in cross-border cooperation and working on the local level for social problem solving are not seen as a threat or as ‘foreign agents’. Thus, divisive politics of the federal government was much less relevant in affecting civil society cooperation with partners in EU member states on the local level. This could be clearly seen in the case of the Republic of Karelia, where special mechanisms were established to help NGOs facing difficulties created by the federal legislation. As a result, the application of federal legislation was more relaxed there than in other Russian regions. This can be partly explained by the positive experience of NGOs involvement in managing pressing social problems and cross-border cooperation, which is very important for the region. Therefore here regional and local governments have continued to support NGOs in spite of foreign funding, especially, from Finland and the EU.

Moreover, by introducing its own development policy, the Russian government also came to the idea that the NGOs can participate in the implementation of this policy. Thus, alongside the state agency ‘Rosstrudnichestvo’, some NGOs were created and included into this work, first of all, the ‘Russky mir’ (the Russian World) Foundation and the Gorchankov Fund, who support other NGOs and initiatives in the field of international relations. Although in general the involvement of NGOs in the policy field is still very moderate, and most development policy is implemented by the state agency, its departments and centers and houses for Russian culture and language over the world, as well as by the Russian embassies and consulates themselves, the agency's attempts to work also with the NGOs in this field is clearly available.
This development policy of Russia is implemented especially actively in its premium area of national interests, i.e. in the former Soviet Union countries. Moreover, after the Ukrainian crisis and the lessons Russian foreign policy learned from its ‘failure’ in the struggle over the Ukrainian population in 2014, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also started to speak about the attraction of Russian NGOs to participate in the implementation of Russian foreign policy. This means that more NGOs can be included in the international relations field from the Russian side, if they will participate in the implementation of official Russian foreign policy.

Therefore, since the beginning of the 2000s, we can observe contradicting processes in the transformation of the role of Russian NGOs in international relations. On the one hand, the NGOs funded by foreign foundations and programs became unwelcome in Russia and have experienced more and more strengthened restrictive measures, which became especially strong in 2014-2015. In this case, although the NGOs continued to work on the democracy and human rights agenda, their work became contradictory to official Russian foreign policy, which became more oriented not on these Western concepts of democracy, but on its ‘traditional values’ and ‘national interests’, which are different and contradict democratic policies and values. It means that the situation of the 1990s changed: while before, the policy of Russian NGOs participating in the international projects towards democracy and the development of civil society was in line with official Russian foreign policy, in the 2000s the situation changed, and the participation of the Russian NGOs became contradictory to the Russian foreign policy.

At the same time, the Russian government started to include some loyal Russian NGOs into the implementation of its official foreign policy. This means that while Russia is experiencing the transformation from recipient to donor status, it is also trying to cancel the participation of NGOs in the previous policy patterns and to develop new ones, which are more characteristic to the donor countries.

**Empirical examples of the Russian NGOs in international forums**

In order to evaluate the role of Russian NGOs in international relations, it is not enough to look at their connection with official Russian foreign policy, because it is not the only aspect of the participation of Russian NGOs in international relations.

During the 1990-2000s, Russian NGOs have developed a lot of cooperation ties with other NGOs around the world and with international organizations, which are not only connected with the implementation of the development policies of other states and organizations, but which have more general global objectives and tasks.
Thus, Russian NGOs became an active part of international NGOs networks, coalitions and organizations, and they quite actively participate in parallel and in their own international negotiations. One example here is the UN climate change negotiations, where Russian NGOs are quite new, but active in the representation of their interests in coordination and consolidation with each other and with NGOs from other different countries, acting independently from the state, but in some communication with the state’s official representatives. Another recent example was G20 negotiations in Russia in 2013, when the official summit was accompanied by civil society negotiations with the leadership of Russian NGOs as representatives of the host country.

Although now the Russian NGOs have quite a good image and influence in the international networks and coalitions, they are still, in financial terms, quite dependent on international and foreign funding, because they have no funding in Russia which can be used for the international activities. As an expert said in his interview, “in the 1990s, the Russian NGOs started to be active in international networks, and in the 2000s they have collected a lot of expertise, they became experts not only on Russia, but also on other countries and regions, on the global problems and themes.” So, a number of Russian NGOs, due to their active participation in international projects and networks, some training or study in the best American and European universities, became very professional and respected. At the same time, they kept their dependence on foreign funding for international activities, which creates opportunities for the Western NGOs to dominate in the cooperation, although as research shows, it does not mean some automatic domination. A lot of Russian participants speak about the equality in the cooperation, in spite of this financial disparity, but some cases are also mentioned where the Western NGOs and foundations defined the conditions of cooperation due to their financial domination.

In general, active and developed NGOs coalitions and networks are mostly acting in the human rights protection and environmental fields, as these provide an opportunity to refer to the international norms and standards and their specific topics relevant for the whole world. So, the same is relevant for Russia: the best involvement of Russian NGOs is observed in these fields too.

Intergovernmental organizations where Russia is a member, and therefore is obliged to follow the norms and decisions adopted by these organizations, are especially important for the Russian NGOs networks and coalitions. The most relevant organizations here are the United Nations Organization, the Council of Europe, Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe etc. The logic of the NGOs’ cooperation around these organizations is similar for a lot of NGOs from the countries where human rights are violated: if the NGOs cannot influence their governments within the internal political system, they try to do so through the intergovernmental organizations, which can insist on the respect of

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6 Interview 3/1
7 The official web page of the G20 in 2013 is here: [http://ru.g20russia.ru/](http://ru.g20russia.ru/)
8 Interview 3/2
international norms, if they are violated in some of the member states. Such a strategy in the literature was titled as a “boomerang pattern” meaning that “domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside” (Keck, Sikkink 1998).

In case of Russia, this “boomerang pattern” is used very actively, as can be seen for example from the statistics of the European Court of Human Rights, which is related to the “European Convention of Human Rights” within the Council of Europe. Russians are the most active applicants in the ECHR, and a very important role here is played by the Russian human rights NGOs and advocates, helping citizens in the application and during the processes.

The same strategy is also used in other intergovernmental organizations, not only by NGOs from Russia, but also from many other countries where violations of international norms and rules are commonplace. Often, these are developing countries and authoritarian states, where human rights are violated by the state institutions and where not enough channels exist for the NGOs to influence policy making and implementation.

In this process, Western NGOs, based in countries where the situation with human rights and environmental protection is relatively satisfactory and where the NGOs can use internal political channels and ways of problem solving, need the intergovernmental organization to influence their own countries much less. But in this situation they are very active in helping the NGOs from the other countries to influence the situation in their countries.

For these purposes, NGO networks and coalitions are being built around such intergovernmental organizations, in order to consolidate and strengthen the influence of the participating NGOs from different countries. These networks and coalitions can be organized in very different ways. Sometimes, they have some stable institutional structure, memberships etc., in some cases they are just cooperating on some ad hoc issues.

An empirical example: World Heritage Watch

These NGO networks can also develop with time and Russian NGOs can play a very important role in this dynamic development. Thus, an example can be brought here about the creation of World Heritage Watch, an NGO network that was initiated in 2012 around the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and its main political institution the World Heritage Committee. Although some consultative expert institutions such as ICOMOS and IUCN have already existed for many years, no representation of civil societies and local communities was organized. But such a need became obvious in many cases where World Heritage Sites were in danger because of different threats caused by business or state activities. As they were not being heard by their own governments, the NGOs or citizens in such countries need an opportunity to influence them through an intergovernmental organization, and reference to international obligations; in this case through the UNESCO World Heritage Committee and World Heritage Convention.
Therefore, the idea of calling for a non-governmental meeting around the World Heritage Committee had already been formulated many times, but it was very difficult to implement. It happened for the first time in St. Petersburg (Russia), where the 40th Annual Session of the World Heritage Committee was held during the Russian presidency in 2012. The session was being held for the first time in Russia. Because of the threat to the UNESCO Site “St. Petersburg and Related Group of Monuments” posed by the “Gazprom Tower” which was planned at the time, local NGOs and civil movements had already established good working ties with some other international NGOs and UNESCO institutions. So, they had some resources and knowledge about the situation, and decided to use the opportunity to influence the World Heritage Committee’s decisions through the NGOs network. They could also mobilize environmental NGOs, who also had a lot of problems during the protection of the natural World Heritage Sites, and at the same time had very stable relations with environmental international networks and NGOs all over the world. Together, Russian NGOs initiated and organized in St. Petersburg, in cooperation with their international colleagues, the first International NGOs Forum “Protection of the World Heritage Properties” on June 22-24, 2012, just before the official Session. The Forum collected more than 120 participants from about 20 different countries. Some leading UNESCO officials supported the initiative and participated with their speeches in support of the civil society initiative to participate in the protection of World Heritage.

As a result of the first Forum, six Resolutions were adopted and presented to the official Session of the World Heritage Committee, where the official delegations from all the member states are represented. Besides this, the decision was made to establish a World Heritage Watch, an NGO network, which would organize such parallel NGOs Forums before every annual governmental session. In spite of this decision, in 2013 in Cambodia and in 2014 in Qatar, such a forum was not organized, because the official World Heritage Committee meeting was held in countries, where no NGO was able to organize an NGO Forum, even though the initiative was already there and some political support was available from the UNESCO institutions. The second Forum in the form of the International NGO Conference was organized only in 2015 in Bonn in Germany, due to the German NGOs and activists, as well as due to the financial support of the German government. The number of participants here was already above 200 from more than 30 countries from all five continents, and the Russian NGOs were represented quite well. The adopted resolutions were dedicated to specific World Heritage Sites which were in danger and to the general issue of the better inclusion of NGOs into UNESCO management structures. The next Forum is presently being prepared by the World Heritage Watch network, which is promising further international development as a new NGO coalition.

What is interesting from this case for my research is that the Russian NGOs, in 2012, were able to mobilize enough resources (although mainly from international sources) for the first organization of an NGO forum, which became a basis for building a new stable international network. The same could not be
done by NGOs from Cambodia and Qatar, although maybe they had such a need as well. And of course, it was done quite successfully in Germany, because it was easier to get financial and political support from the German government. So, it means again, that the Russian NGOs have this intermediate position—showing some characteristics of NGOs in developed countries and being able to act in similar ways to them, but at the same time, their needs are similar to the developing countries, which use the intergovernmental organizations in order to influence their own governments in the situation of lack of internal political channels of access.

An empirical example: EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

Another interesting example, which I will consider in this paper, is the functioning of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum⁹, which was established as an NGO network in March 2011. In the beginning, it included 40 NGOs from the European Union and Russia, working on different issues, in order to establish a cooperation platform within the EU-Russia cooperation. It was quite a positive period of EU-Russia relations, when the “Partnership for Modernization” was developed and implemented. Therefore, the NGOs hoped to have influence on the EU-Russia intergovernmental dialogue in order to present the civil society perspectives.

Already, before the Civil Society Forum, Russian NGOs had cooperated with their colleagues from the EU, but also with the EU political institutions. For example, some human rights NGOs participated in the consultations of the EU institutions before the EU-Russia Human Rights Dialogue official meetings.

Since its foundation in 2011, the Forum has attracted a lot of new member organizations, whose whole number now is more than 150 from both sides. An effective self-governing institutional structure was created and strengthened. Thus, the main decision-making institution is the General Assembly, an annual gathering of all or most members. It elects a Steering Committee, representing an equal number (4-6) of members from the EU and Russia. The permanent Secretariat, situated in 2011-2012 in Prague and since 2013 in Berlin, is responsible for management of everyday activities of the Forum and for the implementation of the decisions taken by the collective institutions mentioned above. The work of the Forum is organized as a platform for exchange and cooperation between different NGOs and as a channel for advocacy and communication with different policy-makers and civil society actors both in the EU and in Russia.

In the beginning, discussions were held about the forum's influence on the EU-Russia relations and official negotiations, so the Forum could be developed as a civil society accompaniment of the intergovernmental negotiations. But political developments, and especially the strengthening authoritarian tendencies in Russia, as well as political conflict between the EU and Russia led to the

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⁹ Official web page is [http://eu-russia-csf.org](http://eu-russia-csf.org)
change of the work and this primary idea. Thus, by 2012-2013 it had already become clear that the Russian government had chosen a policy of restrictive measures and selective repressions towards political and civil society activists. The Forum started to react by issuing more and more Statements protesting against some measures like the adoption of the legislation on “foreign agents” in 2012, or the persecution of Forum members like the Association GOLOS and the Kostroma Center for Support of Community Initiatives\textsuperscript{10}. The very first NGOs declared as foreign agents were members of the Forum, and it was a necessary step by the Forum to show a sign of solidarity and support for them. Therefore, this task of the protection of its members, and the Russian civil society sector in general, became another very important task of the Forum.

In an internal survey conducted among the members in October – November 2013\textsuperscript{11}, it became clear that, although none of the members considered the CSF as a means for protection of their own NGO, some of them (EU members even more then Russian ones) considered it useful for the protection of the whole NGO sector in Russia (see Table 2 below). But the most important change was seen in the majority of answers of both Russian and EU members, which became clearly dominated by the answers connected with the internal cooperation between NGOs within the Forum, in comparison with the preliminary goals of the Forum to influence the EU-Russia intergovernmental dialogue. It was also underlined in some narratives and interviews of that time that this shift was observed: from the orientation on influencing EU-Russia dialogue, towards the internal cooperation between the EU and Russian NGOs within the Forum for their own aims. Some respondents saw it as a natural tendency in the situation of disappointment, when Russian government was applying its unfriendly policy towards NGOs more stringently, and showing its disinterest in the participation of NGOs in its dialogue with the EU.

\textsuperscript{10} See more Statements of the CSF Steering Committee here: http://eu-russia-csf.org/en/statements/steering-committee

\textsuperscript{11} The Survey was carried out by Elena Belokurova on demand of the CSF Steering Committee, results were not published
Table 2. Answers to the question “What do you seek in the Forum?”

November 2013, about 50% of all the members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EU, votes</th>
<th>EU, %</th>
<th>Russia, votes</th>
<th>Russia, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>new contacts, partners</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thematic cooperation and exchange of experiences</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>networking on common European topics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new funding opportunities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protection of your own NGO</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stronger position in the protection of the NGO sector in Russia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building a global civil society without borders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more effectively promoting values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stronger influence on policies of governments of EU and Russia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stronger influence of the EU-Russia intergovernmental dialogue</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This development was also accompanied with quite painful internal discussion about the position towards the Russian repressive policies, and difficulties in finding common words and evaluations, which would reflect all the different opinions presented in the Forum. Finally, the diversity of opinions and positions was recognized, and already in 2014 and 2015, no common general statement of the General Assembly was adopted. Instead of that, more attention started to be paid to the cooperation within the thematic working group, implementation of common projects and initiatives, work on solidarity and advocacy of the different positions of participating NGOs towards different political and civil society institutions in both the EU and Russia.

This trend was strengthened later in 2014-2015, when the solidarity for NGOs, and with other NGOs, became one of the most important tasks. It could be observed in another internal survey carried out in October-November 2014 among the CSF members in order to streamline various aspects of the Forum’s internal policy and external strategy\(^\text{12}\).

\(^{12}\) The Survey was conducted and analyzed by Elena Belokurova and Olga Drozdova, on demand of the Internal Communication group, the results were not published.
Because the situation around the Forum dramatically changed in 2014, the respondents were asked to assess the previous and current topicality of their priorities. Thus, regarding the influence on Russia’s policies, both Russian and European NGOs no longer consider this task as topical or feasible (Table 3). Only one Russian NGO and four European participants considered the possibility of influencing EU policies as a topical issue. A search for new fundraising opportunities became more important for Russian participants, although the Forum itself cannot provide any funding for the everyday work of the participating NGOs. European participants, however, considered the above tasks to be somewhat less important. More Russian participants spoke in favor of the protection of Russian NGOs. European NGOs have a high opinion of the opportunity to use the forum framework for their participation in common European networks on various topics. However, Russian participants consider this task to be less significant. Importantly, only 47% of Russian NGOs consider the goal of forming a global civil society to be attractive, as compared to 63% in the recent past. European NGOs also regard this goal to be less meaningful. However, the search for new partners remains topical for both, and its importance has grown for most NGOs, including 80% of Russian and 73% of EU participants.

Table 3. Answers to the questions about the members’ goals upon accession and at the moment of the survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Goals upon accession</th>
<th>Goals remaining topical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global civil society</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of Russian NGOs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common European networks on different topics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values promotion</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundraising</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on EU-Russia relations</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on EU policies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence on Russia’s policies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a result of this tendency, the Mid-Term Development Strategy adopted by the majority of members in summer 2015, proclaims the following major objectives (in order of prioritization):

1. “Support and solidarity for civil society organizations and activists facing pressure and persecution.
2. Promoting cooperation between civil society organizations in Russia and the EU based on shared values, and facilitating people-to-people exchanges.
3. Efforts to promote shared values strengthen the European legal frameworks and pan-European institutions, facilitate Russian-European integration, and create a common public space”\(^\text{13}\).

This short analysis of the EU-Russia Civil Society shows that, in the situation of pressure on the NGOs participating in international relations, to some extent the cooperation ties became even stronger. Very dense activity of NGOs in the framework of the Forum contributed to the “better knowledge of each other, even of the Russian organizations among each others”\(^\text{14}\). Moreover, the participation in international relations became more professional and directed, and in most cases very valuable. And this is although no financial support comes for the Russian NGOs (just for their participation in the events and projects), and the pressure over NGOs with international activities, especially in times of crisis in EU-Russia relations, is strengthened. In some sense, these Russian NGOs became closer to the EU in terms of values and objectives, than to the Russian official policies.

Moreover, it is important to underline here the equal positions and respect towards the Russian members, although financially their participation is made possible through the Western and international funding. But the equality and mutual respect can be seen in the whole structure of this self-governed institution, and in the previous experiences of cooperation and in the shared values and objectives as well as in the mutual recognition of professional and motivated engagement for these values.

This is especially important in times, when the deep crisis in EU-Russian relations and connected mutual sanctions led to many economic and social cooperation partners becoming more suspicious towards each other. Such platforms as the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum help the NGOs to keep cooperative relations and mutual understanding during these difficult times.

\(^{13}\) On Mid-Term Strategy of Development of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (mid-2015 - mid- 2018), Internal Document
\(^{14}\) Interview 2/6
Testing the hypotheses on the political factors influencing the participation of Russian NGOs in international relations

The analysis of the dynamics and diversity of participation of Russian NGOs in international relations shows that this situation is very difficult to define, because it is contradictory and complicated. On the one hand, most of the NGOs working internationally still get foreign funding from international organizations as well as from Western governments and NGOs. In the international arena, they use the ‘boomerang’ mechanism to influence their own government through the international community, and develop effective cooperation networks and platforms as strong recognized professional actors. This all contradicts the official Russian foreign policy, which tries to limit influences from outside of Russia, to close the society and state, and to implement restrictive measures towards these internationally recognized NGOs. Moreover, it tries to create and include its own loyal NGOs into its own development policy, first of all in the former Soviet Union countries and other countries, which are seen as a field of national interests by the official foreign policy.

The theoretical explanations of this contradictory situation can be found in different approaches and were formulated at the beginning of this paper as hypotheses. They can be discussed here with the question as to whether they can provide satisfactory explanations.

Hypothesis 1 on the role of political regime

The easiest hypothesis is connected with the political regime hypothesis, which explains the restrictive measures towards critical NGOs as a reflection of the authoritarian trend in the government’s development. The analysis presented above of the history of restrictive policies in Russia since the beginning 2000s and especially after 2004 confirms this hypothesis very well. Thus, a very clear correlation is observed between the strengthening of these policies and preparation for elections as well as attempts to connect the restrictive measures with ‘political activity’, i.e. public critics of governmental policies. All these aspects, as well as history in general, speaks in favor of this hypothesis.

However, although the authoritarian hypothesis looks very plausible, it alone cannot explain everything, and especially all the other cases of the restrictive measures, which present not only the authoritarian regimes. Moreover, it does not explain, why and how the Russian NGOs are still involved in international relations. Therefore, elaboration on the further hypotheses can contribute to the explanation of the Russian case.
Hypothesis 2 on Russia’s transition status of emerging economy and power between a recipient and a donor

Thus, another hypothesis is connected with the intermediate position of Russia as emerging economy and power and transition from the recipient towards a donor position. Indeed, recently Russia also became a donor in the development field by contributing to international development and by helping some developing countries. Although the economic situation in Russia is not so good, and due to its economic indicators Russia is not obliged to be a donor, it nevertheless expressed a desire participate, and is now one of the new donors and participants in the UN Millennium Development Goals. Although a special Russian Federation’ Concept on Assistance to International Development was adopted in April 2014 (Concept 2014), information about its participation in Russian sources is not easy to come by since it is not discussed much. Most Russians are not aware of these activities and support.

Moreover, they are not sure about whether Russia is ready and should help developing countries. Thus, in the representative mass survey conducted by ROMIS in the framework of the NEPORUS project in September 2014, the opinions of people are quite diverse and undecided, because there is no dominant position on this issue (Table 4). A third of respondents answer “no”, one third is ready to help the countries of the former Soviet Union, and many people think that the poorest countries should get some aid from Russia. In total, more than a half would like to provide aid to some other countries. It demonstrates a readiness of people to transfer to the donor position.

Table 4. The answers to the question “Q32. Should Russia organize and finance aid to other countries?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>percent</th>
<th>34,1</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, especially to the countries of the former Soviet Union</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>31,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>18,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, to all weak developing countries in the world</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>13,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, especially to the poorest African countries</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>10,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1 007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quite in line with this situation, the Russian soft power policy, like in other countries, is centred on the dissemination of information about Russia and the popularization of the Russian language in different countries of the world. Although in many countries there were already Russian cultural centers, especially in the countries which were allies of the Soviet Union, specifically in
Central and Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, in the 1990s they were underfunded and underestimated. However, they were further developed in the mid-2000s when both financial aid and institutional bases were improved for their functioning abroad. This improvement was connected with the creation of the special agency called Rossotrudnichestvo in 2008, whose full title is the ‘Federal agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States affairs, for compatriots living abroad, and for international humanitarian cooperation’. In 77 countries, there are now 59 Russian centers for science and culture and 18 representative offices in the diplomatic missions of the Russian Federation. As previously mentioned, these centres support study of the Russian language, history, traditions and culture, and organize cultural events and festivals, cooperate with the diaspora living in these countries, and with alumni of Russian or Soviet universities. Their aim is ‘to achieve an objective image of contemporary Russia, its material and spiritual potential, as well as its internal and external policy’. In the last year especially, a lot attention was paid to different Russian-speaking groups called the ‘Russian world’ and whose support was mobilized by the official Russian authorities. The main regions where these centers are active are the CIS countries and especially the non-recognized states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who also get support through humanitarian programs funded by Russia.

These cultural and language policies are also supported by the Russian population. Thus, most people think that in order to improve Russia’s image abroad, it should promote Russian culture and language (Table 5). At present, this is mostly done through the state agencies and only a little bit through NGOs, but some Russian NGOs already participate in the implementation of this policy.

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Table 5. The answers to the question “Q33. What can Russia do to improve its image abroad?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To provide Russian participation in the international events</td>
<td>52,8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To organize festivals and events for traditional Russian culture</td>
<td>37,9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To organize and finance Centers for Russian language and culture</td>
<td>34,5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide opportunities for the Russian NGOs to participate</td>
<td>30,5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>16,9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To strengthen the army and navy / military superiority</td>
<td>0,4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the economy / restore order</td>
<td>0,2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the living conditions / social actions</td>
<td>0,2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration of patriotism</td>
<td>0,1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport achievements</td>
<td>0,1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clear policy towards foreigners</td>
<td>0,1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1 007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, it is interesting that the majority of people speak about Russian participation in international events (more than a half) and opportunities for the Russian NGOs to participate (more than 30%), so they consider positively the role and activities of the Russian NGOs in the international relations.

Moreover, the majority of people (in sum, about 60%) are still ready to accept financial aid from other countries (Table 6). However, more than 40% speak about limitations, like aid only from friendly countries (which are non-western, which could be seen in the comments to the answers) or for some aims like social or emergency situations (which also could be seen in the comments to the answers). Almost 25% say that such financial aid should be accepted only by the state authorities and not by NGOs. This suggests that they implicitly
believe that the NGOs should not accept any finances without the approval of the state, and for some other reasons which may or may not include social ones.

**Table 6. The answers to the question “Q29. Should Russia accept financial aid from other countries?”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>percent</th>
<th>24.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but only the state authorities and not by the NGOs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, from any country</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but only from some friendly countries</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but only for some aims</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these data show that the transformation of Russia from the recipient to the donor status is not clear and is contradictory. On the one hand, people agree that this process is timely and Russia should go out of foreign aid. But on the other hand, this transition is logical, when the state respects human rights and democratic rules, and NGOs do not need the international community in order to influence their own governments. This is not the case in Russia, therefore, the refusal of foreign funding and the support of others does not look as appropriate. Moreover, the analysis of the donor policy of Russia shows that the actual purpose of participation is for Russia to demonstrate its significance in the global arena and its strength both in terms of economic development and power to the world and especially to the most developed countries of the West.

So, this logic of transition from recipient to donor status to some extent explains the Russian official policies towards NGOs still receiving foreign funding. It also suggests that the transition is incomplete, while the state still does not have its own appropriate channels of access and financial as well as administrative support for NGOs. It also underlines that the donor status is also not so easy to achieve, and a lot should be done, and that Russia is still at the beginning of this path.

*Hypothesis 3 on the ‘closing space’ for Russian NGOs as response of Russian government to the real and constructed external threats*

Another hypothesis is connected with the debates about the ‘closing space’ as a response to external threats like transnational terrorism, migration flows etc. For Russia, this hypothesis is only partly relevant. Thus, even if the reasons for the policy towards NGOs are not explained by external threats directly, the popular
support of the restrictive measures against ‘foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable organizations’ is strengthened by the ‘informational war’ with the West. Since 2014, the state-owned mass media are actively constructing the image around the USA and Europe as enemies, as well as threats coming from there. Moreover, many films and video-stories about different NGOs getting the funding from international sources are shown by constructing their image as ‘spies’ and ‘enemies’. So, this factor is important for the mobilization of public support for the policies towards ‘foreign agents’, which is quite high, as was shown in different surveys, among them in the already mentioned survey by ROMIR in September 2014 (see Table 7 and Table 8).

Table 7. The answers to the question “Q25. Should NGOs receiving foreign funding be registered as “foreign agents”?”

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>49,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to determine</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>31,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>19,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. The answers to the question “Q24. Do you believe that NGOs that are funded from abroad wish to harm Russia’s interests?”

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, they wish to harm Russia’s interests</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>39,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to say</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>31,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, they do not wish to harm Russia’s interests</td>
<td>percent</td>
<td>29,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypotheses 4-5 on explanation of restrictions for Russian NGOs through the return of Russia to nation states/soverignty and geopolitics/neorealism as dominant ideology

The hypothesis can be tested through the evaluation of the arguments brought for the justification of the restrictive policy towards the Russian NGOs as well as of the dominating political and academic discourses about the current Russian foreign policy and their connection with the restrictive measures towards Russian NGOs.

In Russia, this hypothesis is supported by the clear discursive domination of traditional ‘Realpolitik’ and neo-realism in both politics and international relations studies (Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2005). For example, Russia has
underestimated the development of European integration for a very long time and paid insufficient attention to it. As a result, especially in the 1990s, but also still in many cases in the 2000s, Russian foreign policy has been built on bilateral relations with individual members of the EU mainly by working with the national interests of each one individually, but not with the EU as a whole (Schuette 2007). Now, the extent of European integration is recognized, and the EU is seen in Russia as an important level of governance including in the foreign policy field. But even in this case, when the Russian media are reporting about the EU, they always undermine its significance and highlight the contradiction of different member states’ positions within the EU. In foreign policy, the bilateral relations with different EU member states are important, because Russia tries to have different kinds of relations with different EU member states and in recent years even to play with these differences.

The strengthening of the realist perspective became especially obvious during the crisis of Russia’s place in the international system after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. According to the dominant Russian discourse, references are often made regarding the crucial role of the US and Western countries, which ‘support behind the scenes’ the Maidan and the newly elected Ukrainian President Petr Poroshenko and his policies. The political crisis in Ukraine is seen in Russia as a war for ‘spheres of influence’ between the biggest superpowers – United States and Russia. According to this logic, Ukraine was seen as a weak and even ‘failed’ state, and became an area where the contradictions between Russia and the West, and especially the US, were expressed. Here, global governance structures, integration processes and international law were disregarded and the domination of some states over others, their national interests and powers, reigned supreme. Thus, the chief editor of the Russia in Global Affairs Journal, which is one of most influential in Russia, writes about strengths and weaknesses of different states and about ‘global aikido’ surrounding the Ukrainian crisis (Lukyanov 2014).

There are different versions of why Russian external policy discourse is dominated by the realist and neo-realist paradigms, but the most probable it that it is a result of the Soviet vision of international relations, which was mostly based on the dichotomy and power play of the Cold War between the superpowers (Soviet Union and the US). The international system of this period was characterized by the division of most countries of Europe, Africa and even some countries of Asia between these two ‘worlds’ or spheres of influence, which were led either by the capitalist US or by the socialist USSR. These camps were in competition for the position of hegemon and vied for support from other countries, they competed for a show of military strength and influence and power in the world. This neo-realist paradigm was also the mainstream of the Soviet understanding of international relations. Therefore, the return to this paradigm became so easy for so many politicians, scholars, journalists and population.

During the period of the 1990s, when the concepts of global governance and international or world society within the paradigm of neo-liberalism were very
popular, both in international politics and academic discourse, (Hurrell 2007), Russian politics and discourse underestimated and overlooked the importance of these new concepts and paradigms. They were mostly engaged in the internal politics of the transition to the new political and economic system and, at the time, were very Russian-centric in this sense. With regard to international politics, when Russia lost the Cold War, they only were interested in the international assistance they could obtain to overcome and soften its economic crises and its integration into the Western-led international system. Therefore, in the 1990s, Russia was rather passive in international relations, and in most cases it was an object of the foreign policies of other countries, first and foremost of the US and EU member states, and of international organizations. In such a situation, the majority of politicians were not inclined to believe in global governance approaches. As they were not really involved in the discussions of these times, therefore they did not attach value or significance to these new concepts and paradigms.

Now, the ‘Realpolitik’ paradigm is actively used by the current Russian political elite, first of all because it easily allows the states to organize national mobilizations for support of its external and internal policies. These policies focus on the struggle against an enemy, who it is believed is ‘hidden behind’ different international organizations, foreign NGOs and global governance structures. This idea is very easily understandable for the population, which makes it appropriate for mass mobilization of public opinion against these ‘enemies’. Thus, during the conflict over Ukraine, the Russian population was mobilized for support of Russian foreign policy against the US as the main enemy. This political significance of the ‘Realpolitik’ paradigm is an explanation of its popularity in Russian politics.

In such a situation, where the Russian state, like some other states in the world, is trying to construct enemies and external conflicts, the NGOs see the need to resist this simplified picture of international relations and justified ‘closing society’. They try to argue for the liberal and communicative approach in international relations, to keep and even strengthen the communications with other NGOs and societies beyond their borders, to develop more solidarity, consolidation and mutual understanding. Together, they aim to react against these negative tendencies around the world. This resistance is difficult and not so well organized yet, but the trend towards the consolidation of NGOs and civil societies is obvious. The Russian NGOs facing restrictive measures very strongly and earlier than NGOs in many other countries, have collected a lot of experience, developed and implemented new strategies and tactics, which can be important also for other countries, if similar restrictive measures are developed in the same direction there.

The examples presented of international networks where the Russian participants are very active, show how these attempts of civil societies’ consolidation can work against the cooperation of geopolitically closed states, oriented towards “traditional values” and self-isolation from external influences. It explains that now not only the topics of human rights and environment, which
are traditional for international relations, are discussed in the civil society forums, but also common investigations of trans-border corruption, resistance to propaganda and international wars, search for conflict resolution strategies and methodologies, access to information and many other common challenges.

Conclusion

The analysis of the participation of Russian NGOs in international relations, as well as of the political factors influencing them, shows that, although history is important, the most recent years demonstrate very important trends. There is a conflict between the closing states on the one hand, and resisting NGOs on the other – trying to keep their communication spaces beyond their borders. This trend is observed also in many other countries all over the world, therefore, an attempt to find explanations of this trend as well as testing the hypotheses on the Russian case is an important task, which was undertaken in this paper.

The analysis of the hypotheses shows that almost all of them can be confirmed in the Russian case. Thus, the political regime hypothesis explains the situation very well, as well as the transition of Russia from the recipient towards a donor position in the world. But they are not enough in understanding the current situation. Now, in the globalized world, not only the domestic politics and internal political reasons are relevant, but also the general trend of a return to the concept of nation states, closing societies and neorealist perspective in international relations. These trends explain also the strategies of NGOs and civil societies in both Russia and other countries, which are connected with the keeping and strengthening of consolidation, international solidarities and communication between societies beyond the state borders.

In general, this research has demonstrated how many hypotheses and factors can be of importance in explaining the change of the role of NGOs in international relations as well as political factors influencing this process. Therefore, for better understanding and further clarification, it would be necessary to include the Russian case into the comparative perspective, whose elements were brought into the explanation.

Thus, comparison allows us to understand the broader contexts, to find additional explanatory factors, theoretical frameworks and formulate new corresponding hypotheses. However, at the same time, it brings the traditional problem of comparative methods, which is connected with the methodological problem “too many variables – too few cases”, which can be relevant for the explanation of the phenomenon. Therefore, the comparative analysis should be carried out both theoretically and empirically carefully, but it is necessary in order to evaluate the changing situation and to explain its main roots and reasons.

Moreover, a comparative analysis of more cases would bring both the test of these hypotheses as well as the formulation and test of new hypotheses. Therefore, such an analysis is highly desirable, although it will be very difficult to achieve. As was shown in the paper, the test of some of the hypotheses is
connected with the analysis of political argumentation, which could be possible to some extent to conduct in one case (that of Russia), but which will face many methodological difficulties in the comparative analysis of a number of cases. However, these problems should not hinder the further research, which will be highly appreciated both in the framework of social science and in the practical field of NGOs acting in the international relations.
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